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New York

President: Mr. Han Seung-soo (Republic of Korea)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Rosenthal (Guatemala), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 38 *(continued)*

Assistance in mine action

Report of the Secretary-General (A/56/448 and Add.1 and 2)

Mr. Sun (Cambodia): Once again on the General Assembly's agenda this session is the issue of landmines. We continue to address the problems caused by these devices, which currently pose a serious threat to more than 60 countries worldwide.

On behalf of the delegation of Cambodia, I would like to express our deep appreciation to the Secretary-General for his report entitled "Assistance in mine action" contained in document A/56/448, which addresses the continuing problem of landmines and provides us with an opportunity to assess the progress so far achieved by the mine-affected countries and the assistance provided by the world community in the area of mine action. My thanks and appreciation are also extended to members of the United Nations Secretariat, especially the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and its Mine Action Service and the Department for Disarmament Affairs, and, most of all, to the non-governmental organizations and the international community for their continued and determined efforts and cooperation to help achieve progress in this humanitarian action.

I need not repeat that almost three decades of conflict had a severe impact on the economy and infrastructure of Cambodia, mainly in the north-western part of the country, and left innocent people, especially women and children, to face the tragic consequences of the millions of landmines and unexploded ordnance that lie buried in the soil. Being one of the most heavily mine-contaminated nations in the world, Cambodia has continuously taken significant steps in its development efforts to reduce the risk of landmine accidents.

With the support of the international community, the Cambodian Mine-Action Center (CMAC) has evolved into the largest demining explosive ordnance disposal operation in the country, and the progress made so far is encouraging. As one of the largest demining institutions, CMAC is gaining the momentum needed to sustain the confidence and trust of the Government and the donor countries. With its renewed objectives, effective from the year 2000, its motto is "Saving Lives and Supporting Development for Cambodia". CMAC is committed to improving effectiveness, efficiency, transparency and productivity, and has been the primary provider of surveys, mapping, technical training, mine-awareness campaigns and even development of demining technology within the country. As a result of both mine awareness and demining operations, the number of mine victims has been significantly reduced. The monthly rate of

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casualties has dropped from 200, in 1996, to around 80, in 2000. CMAC's overall achievements, from its inception in 1992 to December 2000, include clearance of more than 81 million square metres of land and destruction of more than 700,000 mines and unexploded ordnance (UXO). During last year, the figures indicate that on the 8.4 million square metres of land contaminated by mines and unexploded ordinance, almost 62,000 mines and unexploded ordinance were destroyed.

Despite all these developments, Cambodia still has one of the highest accident rates of mine and unexploded ordinance in the world. With an estimated 4 to 6 million mines and unexploded ordnance buried in the soil of Cambodia, clearance of mines and unexploded ordinance remains an essential activity, which is one of the highest priorities on the agenda of the Royal Government of Cambodia. Moreover, mine and unexploded ordinance awareness programmes are being conducted by socio-economic teams that seek to assess the value of demined land and to educate vulnerable groups living in areas with mines, and the community at large, about landmines and unexploded ordnance and their potential danger. At the provincial level, the newly established Land Use Planning Unit (LUPU) has put various strategies in force in order to eliminate land disputes and see that the land cleared by CMAC is put to proper use, as intended. Today, the living standards of the beneficiaries of such lands have improved, and the rate at which land that has been cleared is being abandoned has diminished since 2000.

Last year, due to the suspension of external support, CMAC embarked on an extensive and painstaking reform process, which is a remarkable achievement. The reform is designed to enhance CMAC's vision, to make it more productive and responsive to the needs of Cambodia, promote transparency and make Government inspections and other independent evaluations more open. As a result of such reforms, including its institutional decentralization, CMAC has undertaken several bilateral projects sponsored by donor countries and development organizations, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Trust Fund. These projects operate in high priority settlement areas along the western borders. Our achievements also include the establishment last year of the Cambodian Mine Action and Victim Assistance Authority (CMAVAA), an institution set up to manage, coordinate and regulate the mine-action sector. In this context, UNDP will support the CMAVAA in preparing an institutional development and capacity-building plan and the development of a national mine-action strategy over the period 2001-2005.

In joining the international efforts, Cambodia sent a small demining team in 1999 to Kosovo as part of its contribution to the peacekeeping operation. We are pleased to have been one of the organizers of an exhibition in Tokyo in July and August this year, at which non-profit organizations called for the removal and abolition of the estimated 60 to 70 million remaining landmines worldwide. We look forward to sharing our experience in the field of demining, if requested, with other countries affected by war and landmines, including future nation-building efforts in Afghanistan.

Since the entry into force of the Ottawa Convention in 1999, we note with great interest the efforts and progress made by the world community in the campaign against landmines worldwide. As a State party to the Ottawa Convention, and bound by the amended Protocol II to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons, my country will continue to join in the global effort in this unflagging crusade devoted to the elimination of landmines throughout the world. At the Third Meeting of States Parties held in Managua in September this year, we noted with satisfaction the progress made so far by countries in dealing with anti-personnel mines and in reducing the number of mine accidents, as well as the progress made in decreasing the number of mine producers.

Despite progress made, we believe that landmines continue to pose a dire threat to human life and constitute a challenge to development efforts worldwide, especially in the most affected countries. In this connection, Cambodia appeals for continued international support to continue tackling this humanitarian problem. We also take this opportunity to extend our deep gratitude and appreciation to all donor countries and international agencies, including non-governmental organizations, for their generous financial and technical assistance to Cambodia.

In light of the Secretary-General's report on assistance in mine action (A/56/448), we believe that a multilateral approach in addressing mine-related issues at the national and global levels would be a positive

step. We firmly believe that the medium-term plan for the period 2001-2005, as endorsed by the Inter-Agency Coordination Group in September 2001, should be enforced in the countries affected by war, integrating all elements of mine-related issues. We share the view that the United Nations' goal of intensifying its efforts, nationally and globally, will not only serve to free affected countries from landmines but also significantly encourage countries to halt and renounce the use of such devices, so hazardous and destructive of human lives.

To conclude, I wish to state that Cambodia is pleased to be a co-sponsor this year of the draft resolution on assistance in mine action.

Mr. Musambachime (Zambia): It is indeed an honour for me to address the Assembly on agenda item 38, entitled "Assistance in mine action". I would also like to pay tribute to the Secretary-General for the timely presentation of his report, in document A/56/448 and Add.1 and 2, which my delegation found very useful.

Zambia considers landmines to be a great hindrance to economic and social development in all affected countries, and especially in developing countries. It is sad that in many parts of the world human beings continue to suffer serious and often fatal injuries from this indiscriminate weapon. Unfortunately, most of the victims are innocent civilians, including women and children. This problem continues long after the cessation of hostilities. For those reasons, anti-personnel landmines have no military value in this high-technology age and should therefore never be regarded by any peace-loving country as the weapon of choice.

I am happy to note that extensive efforts are being undertaken within the United Nations system to eradicate this danger. The draft resolution to be submitted under this item will afford us an opportunity to take stock of our progress in that regard. Zambia fully subscribes to current international efforts to rid the world of this scourge.

After exhaustive consultations, my Government has finally established the Zambia Mine Action Centre, which commenced operations in August 2001. A capacity-building programme is currently under way with the assistance of the Government of the United States of America, to which we owe much appreciation. Training programmes in humanitarian demining, mine awareness and leadership training are currently under way. We would like all our cooperating partners to join the United States in order to improve the efficiency of the programme as we progress towards the implementation phase. The United Nations Mine Action Service, the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining and the International Committee of the Red Cross are making efforts to address the issue of landmines. However, they are greatly constrained by the current United Nations policy in their response to the most serious cases of landmine contamination.

My delegation has noted with some degree of satisfaction the report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/56/448 and Addenda 1 and 2 and entitled "Assistance in mine action". The Secretary-General deserves commendation for proposing various new initiatives in areas of strategic planning and advocacy. However, the United Nations policy and strategy for mine action set out in paragraph 93 of the report gives priority to countries where landmine contamination is widespread. Our experience with the landmine problem is that even a mere suspicion of the presence of mines condemns large tracts of land.

My delegation is of the view that landmines are a humanitarian concern and that they must be addressed from that perspective. In our country, areas suspected to be landmine-affected have experienced impediments in their socio-economic development. In that regard, all efforts to deal with landmines should respect the fundamental humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and humanity. In order to succeed, the firm action taken by the international community against landmines since 1996 requires additional financial, human and material resources. In that regard, my delegation would like the funding levels for mine action increased and sustained.

With regard to the ongoing implementation programme, I wish to report that Zambia had previously carried out some preliminary surveys to determine areas of possible contamination. We intend to undertake a comprehensive nation-wide survey to improve data on landmines. It is in that regard that Zambia has supported previous resolutions on this item, including resolution 55/120 of 6 December 2000, which, inter alia, emphasized the importance of developing a comprehensive information management system for mine action under the coordination of the

Mine Action Service of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

My Government has also made it a point to participate actively in all four Standing Committees of the Ottawa Convention, as well as in the meetings of States parties held at Maputo, Mozambique, at Geneva and at Managua. Our determination to address Zambia's landmine problem will bear fruit. I call upon the relevant partners to provide the necessary support. This exercise will free large tracts of land resources, some of which are very fertile, especially in the border areas which were the front lines of the liberation struggle in southern Africa.

Allow me to conclude by reiterating the importance of the Ottawa Convention and of the need to ensure that it is fully implemented. I wish to appeal to all those countries that have not yet signed the Convention to do so without delay.

Mr. **Weldegiorgis** (Eritrea): The report of the Secretary-General on assistance in mine action (A/56/448 and Add. 1 and 2) highlights the major developments, achievements and challenges faced by the mine action community in the current year. It underlines a number of issues of concern in the fight against landmines. It underscores the critical importance of global coordination and resource mobilization; assistance to national and local authorities; emergency assistance; information management; quality control, training and standards; and advocacy. The report notes the significant progress achieved during the year, especially in the areas of strategic planning, operational support, coordination and information management. It also identifies the challenges posed, particularly by the continuing laying of landmines in several countries, which has grave humanitarian ramifications. The Secretary-General's report is comprehensive, far-reaching and worthy of earnest deliberation. The formulation of a five-year strategy for mine action by the United Nations system represents a significant milestone on the way to a framework for action guided by shared objectives.

My country's experience in the temporary security zone during the second half of this year attests to the importance of the Secretary-General's concept of an emergency response plan to address the immediate requirements of the local population, aid agencies and peacekeeping forces. After the signing of the Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities by Eritrea and Ethiopia on 18 June 2000 and the subsequent resolutions of the Security Council calling on both countries to facilitate emergency mine action assistance in coordination with the United Nations, mine action operations have been initiated on the basis of a rapid landmine survey.

To meet the urgent need for the rapid and safe return of around a quarter of a million internally displaced persons to the temporary security zone, the emergency response programme focused on mine clearance, awareness and training. I wish to inform the General Assembly that significant progress has been made to date.

The major impediment to further progress remains Ethiopia's refusal to provide the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) with operationally useful information on its minefields, despite its obligations under article 8 of the Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities. As a result, Ethiopian-laid minefields in the temporary security zone continue to claim a heavy toll of human life and property, including UNMEE's personnel and vehicles, and prevent returnees from using their farm fields and grazing lands.

With the generous assistance of the United Nations, non-governmental organizations and the donor community, Eritrea has taken enormous strides within a very short time in laying the foundation and building the capacity to address the insidious mine and unexploded ordnance problems which afflict the whole country.

Mine clearance is dangerous work conducted in an often hostile environment with lots of hazards to cope with, and it requires considerable resources for training, equipment and logistics. Hence, resource mobilization and adequate funding are crucial to success.

Mine contamination in Eritrea began in the 1940s, during the Second World War. Moreover, virtually the whole of Eritrea was infested by landmines during the 30-year war of national liberation from 1961-1991. The Eritrean Humanitarian Demining Programme cleared about half a million mines from 1991-1998. However, during the most recent war between Eritrea and Ethiopia, there has been a significant reversal, and mine contamination has been greatly aggravated.

Today, there exist approximately two million landmines and unexploded ordnance in Eritrea, a country of 3.5 million people. This translates into almost one landmine per person — one of the highest per capita levels of contamination in the world. We are aware that making Eritrea free from this immense threat to life and property is our national responsibility. Consistent with our State policy of self-reliance, we insist on ownership of the programme and on setting the priorities. With this as our underlying premise, we are working in close cooperation with our international partners to develop the institutional capacity to eventually make Eritrea free of all landmines and unexploded ordnance.

We appreciate the focus of support, particularly from the United Nations, on national capacity-building, as this will enable Eritreans to deal with an Eritrean problem. We, in Eritrea, are committed to the concept of national ownership, providing a national solution to a national problem. Hence, the Government of Eritrea is committed to extending increased support to the mine-action programme as resources become available.

It is evident that the war against landmines in Eritrea has just begun. The first battle — dealing with the emergency situation created by the return of more than 170,000 internally displaced persons to their mine-infested villages, farms and grazing lands in the temporary security zone — is still being waged. We are also set to conduct a Level I landmines socio-economic impact survey in 2002.

Furthermore, we are trying to own a mine-action information management system to collect, compile and manage census data so as to ensure their most efficient use for mine clearance throughout Eritrea.

We are winning this battle, but it takes many successful battles to win a war. Thus, we need continued support from our partners to provide us with the critical resources to wage this war against this deadly enemy. Our recent accession to the Ottawa Mine Ban Convention is indicative of our commitment to make Eritrea mine-free and to join the global struggle for a mine-free world.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with the decision taken by the Assembly this morning, I now call on the observer of Switzerland.

Mr. Halter (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): The international mine-action community has recently made significant progress in its effort to eliminate the threat of anti-personnel mines. The heinous danger of these mines can only be eliminated through the joint efforts of international organizations, governments, non-governmental organizations, experts and the directly affected populations. Thanks to the cooperation of these various actors, the production, transfer, stockpiling and use of anti-personnel mines have declined, millions of square meters of mined land have been cleared and the number of mine accidents and victims has decreased as a consequence. In spite of the concrete and significant progress, millions of mines remain buried in the ground or continue to be stockpiled.

Switzerland recognizes the key role of the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) as the focal point for mine action within the United Nations system, especially in the field of coordination, policy-making and advocacy. We therefore support the recommendation that the Service be upgraded to a Division and its head be appointed at the level of Director. We also appreciate the valuable contributions of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other United Nations agencies in the fight against mines.

Switzerland welcomes the comprehensive and informative report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly on assistance in mine action. We especially welcome the transition from a reactive mode in crisis situations to a more systematic and strategic approach at the national and global levels.

Furthermore, we took note with appreciation of the United Nations mine-action strategy for 2001-2005. The six goals that the report's addendum clearly defines are reasonable, though ambitious. In our view, particular attention must be given to local capacity-building and national ownership in order to guarantee the long-term sustainability of mine action. Quality management is crucial in view of the limited availability of financial resources.

Switzerland also welcomes United Nations efforts to encourage countries to ratify international instruments pertaining to anti-personnel mines, to accede to them and comply with them.

Switzerland welcomes the creation of the web-based Electronic Mine Information Network (E-MINE) to support the United Nations Mine Action Service in consolidating mine-related information in order to facilitate the development of mine-action programmes, decision-making, the setting of priorities and the mobilization of resources.

Mine action is one of the priorities of Swiss peace and security policy. In order to strengthen the role of the United Nations in the coordination of such activities, Switzerland provides United Nations Mine Action Centres with human and financial resources. At present, Swiss experts are working in Albania, Kosovo, Azerbaijan and Yemen. In order to ensure adequate personnel support we are in the process of establishing a pool of 40 demining experts for international operations, which should be operational by the end of 2002. In addition, United Nations Mine Action Centres receive material support, in par ular devices for low-risk demolition of unexploded ordnance and mines.

The Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD), which Switzerland initiated and largely finances, provides significant support to the United Nations in the field of research and operational assistance.

It has elaborated International Mine Action Standards under a mandate of the UNMAS, and it has developed the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA), which is now in place in over 20 countries. The Centre also supports the implementation of the Convention on anti-personnel mines. In this respect, we welcome the creation of the Implementation Support Unit within the Geneva Centre, aimed at increasing support for the intersessional process.

In the field of victim assistance, together with the International Committee of the Red Cross, the World Health Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund, Switzerland has developed a strategic concept based on a comprehensive approach, which includes not only mine victims but all victims of violence. Only the integration of victims into the wider context of post-conflict reconstruction and into longer-term development cooperation strategies will enable us to find effective and sustainable solutions. Initial valuable experience has been gained in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Nicaragua and Mozambique. The next step is to implement the strategy at the national and regional levels. Accordingly, Switzerland held a workshop in Bangkok from 6 to 8 November last that was aimed at establishing the strategic framework at the regional level.

In the field of mine clearance, Switzerland is supporting projects in the Balkans — in Kosovo, Croatia, Bosnia and Albania — as well as in Africa — in Mozambique, Sudan and Eritrea. Special attention is given to cooperation with local partners. The goal is to enable national mine-action centres to develop their own capacities, in an autonomous and committed manner. Switzerland's approach gives clear priority to socio-economic factors and can therefore be easily integrated into longer-term reconstruction, development and peace-building programmes in war-affected countries. The main responsibility in this area lies, too, with the countries directly concerned.

Switzerland is also active with respect to the destruction of stockpiled mines. In June this year we held a one-week workshop in Fribourg that was aimed at providing basic knowledge for the management of national mine destruction programmes. Given the great interest in the workshop, we intend to repeat it next year. As co-Rapporteur of the Standing Committee on Stockpile Destruction within the mine-ban Convention, we will continue to play an active role in this field.

Switzerland welcomes the important role Geneva plays in mine action, together with New York. Geneva will be honoured to host, in 2002, the Fourth Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on the prohibition of anti-personnel mines.

Switzerland will continue to provide the best possible working conditions for the numerous international and non-governmental organizations in Geneva in order to facilitate the fight against mines and their serious humanitarian consequences.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

I shall now call on those representatives who wish to speak in exercise of the right of reply.

May I remind representatives that, in accordance with General Assembly decision 34/401, statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second intervention and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Harrison (United Kingdom): I would like to speak briefly in response to the remarks made earlier today by the representative of Argentina concerning the Falkland Islands.

We welcome the reference by the representative of Argentina in his speech to the exchange of notes earlier this year between our two Governments, in which we recorded our mutual intention to carry out a feasibility study on the clearance of mines in the Falkland Islands. But we must take issue with his reference to the sovereignty of the Islands. The United Kingdom's position on this issue is well known. It was last set out in detail in my delegation's right of reply to the statement made by the President of Argentina in the General Assembly on 10 November.

Mr. Endrias (Ethiopia): Ethiopia appreciates the role being played by the United Nations and other specialized agencies with regard to their assistance in mine clearance.

As a country suffering from the adverse effects of widespread mines, particularly in areas bordering Eritrea, Ethiopia has been working closely with the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE). To this effect, and contrary to the unfounded allegations made by the Eritrean delegation, Ethiopia has already submitted all information, including the map, to UNMEE. Let me add that Ethiopia is in dire need of assistance in mine clearance.

Concerning other issues raised by the Eritrean delegation, we would like to say that these issues are not in line with agenda item 38, which we are currently dealing with.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to inform delegations that a draft resolution under agenda item 38 will be submitted at a later date.

Agenda item 16 (*continued*)

Election to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other elections

(d) Election of the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme

Note by the Secretary-General (A/56/516)

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): In his note, the Secretary-General informs the Assembly that he wishes to nominate Mr. Klaus Töpfer for re-election as Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme for a four-year term, beginning on 1 February 2002 and ending on 31 January 2006.

Accordingly, may I take it that the General Assembly wishes to elect Mr. Klaus Töpfer as Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) for a four-year term beginning on 1 February 2002 and ending on 31 January 2006?

It was so decided.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I call on the representative of Nigeria.

Mr. Akinsanya (Nigeria): On behalf of the Nigerian delegation, I wish to congratulate Mr. Klaus Töpfer, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), on his re-election. We commend the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for recognizing the enormous contribution made by Mr. Töpfer in the field of environment and development in his first term as Executive Director by nominating him for re-election for a four-year term beginning 1 February 2002.

We believe that Mr. Töpfer has met many of our expectations in his first term as Executive Director. He has been instrumental in building UNEP as a focal point on the environment and in its work in setting the global agenda on environment. Under his guidance, UNEP has worked tirelessly for the promotion of coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development within the United Nations system, as established in its mandate as defined in the Nairobi Declaration.

Among other things, the Declaration focused on, first, the state of the global environment and regional and national environmental trends, as well as the promotion of international cooperation, including in the area of policy advice and early warning information on environmental threats; secondly, the implementation of agreed international norms and policies and monitoring and fostering compliance; and, thirdly, strengthening the coordination of environmental activities in the United Nations system.

We recognize that Mr. Töpfer has further elevated dialogue on the environment and, indeed, on sustainable development, through effective implementation of the decisions of the UNEP

Governing Council regarding the Global Ministerial Environment Forum and international environment governance. This is an important contribution to the process of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and its preparatory processes. Mr. Töpfer's proactive stance on environmental governance is a challenge to United Nations development agencies, which have so far failed to live up to expectations in developing an effective mechanism for the implementation of the development component of sustainable development. We appreciate the fact that Mr. Töpfer acknowledges the dire need for effective sustainable development governance, without which the environmental targets would not be attained.

The delegation of Nigeria commends Mr. Töpfer for his enduring support of Africa and the positive role UNEP played in facilitating the African regional preparatory committee for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, together with other members of the joint expanded secretariat. We are reassured of his support for the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification through the opening of the Global Environment Facility as its financial mechanism. We also believe that the New Partnership for Africa's Development, which provides the framework for Africa's sustainable development, will guide the development of the environmental agenda for our continent.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I am sure that I reflect the sentiments of all members in congratulating Mr. Töpfer on accepting his nomination to re-election. I think we all agree that he has performed commendably as Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme.

We have thus concluded our consideration of sub-item (d) of agenda item 16.

Agenda item 36

Zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic

Report of the Secretary-General (A/56/454 and Add.1)

Draft resolution (A/56/L.12)

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to the Permanent Representative of the Argentine Republic to introduce draft resolution A/56/L.12.

Mr. Listre (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is a great pleasure for me to introduce, on behalf of the member countries of the zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic, draft resolution A/56/L.12. I would like to begin by stating that, since the issuance of the draft resolution, Angola and Cameroon have become co-sponsors.

In 1985 the African and Latin American coastal States of the South Atlantic undertook to strengthen their relations of cooperation with a view to establishing closer, more active and dynamic relations, and in order to achieve the common goals of social and economic development, environmental protection, conservation of living marine resources and preservation of peace in the entire region. To that end, they decided to create the zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic. In the 16 years that have elapsed since the establishment of the zone, tangible achievements have been made in strengthening the relations of cooperation among member States in the framework of respect for pluralism and diversity. As a sign of the continuity and importance of that forum, to date we have held five high-level meetings, the last of which took place in Buenos Aires in October 1998.

The draft resolution before the Assembly reflects the main priorities of the zone and summarizes the achievements made thus far.

With regard to peace and security, the countries of the South Atlantic reaffirm once again the importance of consolidating areas in which the threat or use of nuclear weapons is prohibited. In this respect, we reaffirm our commitment to the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones, as envisaged in the Treaties of Tlatelolco and Pelindaba.

Concerning the illicit arms trade, we welcome the successful conclusion of the recent United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. The countries of the zone are ready and willing to explore joint initiatives aimed at implementing the Programme of Action adopted at that Conference. The valuable initiatives carried out in recent years by Latin American and African States demonstrate the priority that we attach to that question. Those initiatives are referred to in paragraphs 4 and 5 of the draft resolution.

With regard to paragraph 5, I would like to draw the attention of the Assembly and the Secretariat to a revision relating to the small arms initiative taken by the States members of the Economic Community of West African States. In the English version, in the penultimate line of the paragraph, the word "conclude" should be replaced by "further extend", so that the last part of the paragraph reads:

(spoke in English)

> "and the initiatives taken by States members of the Economic Community of West African States to further extend their agreement on a moratorium on the importing, exporting and manufacture of light weapons".

(spoke in Spanish)

Given that one of the objectives of the zone is to achieve a peaceful and negotiated settlement of existing disputes, we call on all States, both members and non-members of the zone, to focus their efforts, in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter and the relevant resolutions of the Organization, on resolving, in a peaceful, just and lasting manner, all outstanding disputes in the South Atlantic. It should be recalled that, in establishing the zone, the General Assembly called on all States to cooperate in the elimination of all sources of tension in the region, to respect the national unity, sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity of the States of the zone and to strictly observe the principle of the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force.

Argentina wishes to reaffirm once again its conviction that the objectives of peace and cooperation that inspired the establishment of the zone can be attained only to the extent that the institutions of representative democracy function properly and that human rights and fundamental freedoms are duly respected in the countries of the region. In this connection, we would like to stress the important conclusions reached at the International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, held in Benin in December 2000.

Furthermore, my country believes that questions of peace and development are interrelated and inseparable. Hence, there is a need to encourage technical and economic cooperation, trade and investment among members of the zone.

Another issue to which Argentina would like to draw attention is the transportation of irradiated nuclear fuel, plutonium and radioactive waste. I wish to stress that the transportation of such material should be carried out in conformity with the appropriate international regulations, in particular those of the International Maritime Organization and the International Atomic Energy Agency, and should take into account the interests of coastal States.

With regard to cooperation in the prevention of drug abuse and the fight against the illicit drug trade, the member States of the zone have committed themselves to broadening and monitoring the exchange of information on issues such as the illicit trade in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, prevention and assistance programmes, money laundering, and chemical precursors. Combating this scourge will require a concerted effort on the part of the international community.

I should not like to conclude without expressing our appreciation to the Government of the Republic of Benin for its generous offer to host, in 2002, the sixth high-level meeting of the States members of the zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic.

Finally, I would like to request all delegations present to take account of the noble goals of the zone and to support draft resolution A/56/L.12, as orally revised.

Mr. Moura (Brazil): I would like to thank the Secretary-General for the report contained in document A/56/454, which gives an account of the views of Member States and the activities of the organizations and bodies of the United Nations system with regard to the zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic. The Brazilian comments are contained in A/56/454/Add.1. We would also like to thank the delegation of Argentina for coordinating the draft resolution before us, and to congratulate it for the work done since the zone's fifth ministerial meeting.

The zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic has been recognized by the international community as a valuable mechanism, providing the countries of the two coasts of the South Atlantic with an important framework for concerted efforts in the pursuit of the common goals of peace, social and economic development and protection of the environment. The zone is an instrument that supplements other institutions and arrangements and

provides member States with mechanisms to better coordinate their actions in facing common problems.

The adoption of General Assembly resolutions on the zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic, with a gradual decrease in the number of abstentions in the voting since its inception in 1986, is indicative of the fact that the relevance of this initiative is not confined to its member States, but has a meaningful impact on the promotion of the objectives of the United Nations as a whole.

The Brazilian Government believes that there are priority areas in which the zone's potential can be most fruitfully put into practice, such as the denuclearization of the region, the protection of the marine environment and cooperation in the fight against drug trafficking and related offences, as well as the illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons.

No doubt remains that the goal of the complete denuclearization of the South Atlantic region is achievable. The Tlatelolco and Pelindaba Treaties provide a basic frame of reference for this endeavour. All States members of the zone are parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Furthermore, cooperation between a denuclearized South Atlantic zone and the countries of the Rarotonga and Bangkok Treaties would make possible the prospect of a southern hemisphere free from nuclear weapons.

With respect to the protection of the marine environment, we understand that the creation of new mechanisms on the issue, within the framework of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, would make a positive contribution to the prevention of accidents and the promotion of the exchange of information and of cooperation.

The fight against drug trafficking is another objective to be pursued. To that end, the coordination of efforts within the zone could be decisive. Bilateral agreements between South Atlantic States, as well as multilateral activities, such as the anti-drug initiative launched at the fourth ministerial meeting, are instrumental in fostering the effectiveness of actions undertaken against that form of organized crime.

The Brazilian Government fully shares the concerns of the international community as regards the potentially destabilizing role played by the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. To that extent, it is highly commendable that, within the zone, the Organization of American States, the Organization of African Unity, the Southern African Development Community and the Economic Community of West African States have undertaken appropriate initiatives to alleviate that major threat to international peace and security.

In order fully to achieve its goals, the zone needs the continuing support of the United Nations system, including the United Nations Development Programme and international financial institutions. The zone's fifth ministerial meeting, held in Buenos Aires in October 1998, once again renewed the commitment of member States to the objectives of the zone. Its final declaration and innovative plan of action adopted on that occasion set out various modalities of cooperation for the common purpose of ensuring peace, security and development. We expect that this process will be further advanced at the sixth meeting, to be held in the friendly nation of Benin.

The zone works as a catalyst for the promotion of dialogue and cooperation among the countries of the Atlantic coast of West Africa and South America. Both sides of the Atlantic can also benefit from each other's experience in the promotion of democratic values, the expansion of trade, investment, and air and sea links and the intensification of South-South cooperation. Brazil attaches great importance to the strengthening of the zone and will continue to work actively with other South Atlantic countries and with the entire United Nations membership for the full implementation of resolution 41/11.

In this spirit, as one of the sponsors of draft resolution A/55/L.12, just presented by the Permanent Representative of Argentina, we are confident that, as in previous years, it will be supported by the overwhelming majority of Member States.

Mr. Akinsanya (Nigeria): I am indeed highly honoured to address this Assembly on agenda item 36, "Zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic". I also wish to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report, contained in document A/56/454 and Add.1.

I should like to pay a glowing tribute to the Ambassador of Argentina for the coordinating role that he has played in the pursuit of our common goal. I also share some of the sentiments of the Ambassador of Brazil, who spoke before me.

The initiative taken in 1986 by the 24 Member States from the two shores of the South Atlantic to create the zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic has remained a landmark achievement in the sphere of multilateral initiatives to promote international peace and security. Nigeria, my country, remains committed to the objectives of the zone and attaches great priority to the achievement of the goals identified in the Buenos Aires final declaration of 1998.

Our priority lies in the areas of peace and security in the zone, illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons, cooperation in the fight against drug trafficking and related offences, the protection of marine resources and coastal environment and the promotion of external trade, investment and economic cooperation.

In their pursuit of zonal peace and security, Member States have established nuclear-weapon-free zones in the African region through the Treaty of Pelindaba and in the Latin American and Caribbean area through the Treaty of Tlatelolco. All member States of the zone have also subscribed to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons as a mark of their irrevocable commitment to a nuclear-weapon-free South Atlantic. We also recall the determined efforts of the member States of the zone in 1998, which were crystallized in the establishment of a "dump watch" mechanism for the prevention of the dumping of radioactive and hazardous wastes in the zone.

We note with concern, however, the growing incidence of transboundary movement of wastes and transportation of radioactive materials that could constitute a threat to the marine life of coastal States and to the ecosystem of the entire region. We therefore call on the international community to respect our desire to keep our zone free of nuclear weapons and nuclear-related materials.

Nigeria's long-standing commitment to fostering regional peace and cooperation is well known. We are proud to be associated with the resolution of the conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone, which would have posed serious threats to the peace and stability of the whole region. It is regrettable that conflicts and wars continue to be waged in many parts of the world. We note, nonetheless, with great satisfaction that, in Africa, the process of peace and stability is gradually gaining momentum. We are equally encouraged by recent developments in Burundi, where a newly installed interim Transitional Government is grappling with the challenges of national reconciliation and integration. We urge all parties to the conflict in Angola to remain committed to fulfilling their obligations under the peace accords, the Lusaka Protocol and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Conscious of the dangers posed to the stability of our region by the incidence of small arms and light weapons, we have intensified efforts to rid the region of the illicit circulation and proliferation of these weapons. It is in this regard that we support international efforts to combat and eradicate the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. The adoption of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects at the United Nations Conference, held in New York in July this year, provides a clear road map for its effective implementation. We also support the call on member States of the zone, as contained in the Secretary-General's report, to explore joint initiatives to implement the Programme of Action in the areas outlined in the report: cooperation in tracing small arms and light weapons; exchange of experience with regard to national systems for the marking and registering of weapons; and the training of competent officials and judicial assistance in this field. Nigeria has set up the National Committee on Small Arms and Light Weapons, which will implement the measures at the national level and will be willing to work with members of the zone in the areas I have mentioned.

Permit me to mention another area of interest to my country in pursuit of peace and cooperation in the South Atlantic zone. Member States of the zone remain concerned about the threat posed by international organized crime through the production of and traffic in drugs. As a demonstration of its commitment to dealing with the drug problem, Nigeria has put in place effective preventive and enforcement measures, which have yielded positive results. In addition, global drug-control plans have been initiated within the West African subregion to facilitate the exchange of data and cross-border operations.

Nigeria has been a victim of these perpetrators of illegal activities and is determined to rid itself of this plague. We wish to express our appreciation to the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) for the assistance given to States affected by

the transit of drugs. The resolution adopted on narcotic drugs at its forty-fourth session on international assistance to States affected by the transit in drugs will no doubt strengthen the work of the UNDCP. We will continue to support international efforts to eliminate from our societies the related scourges of drugs, money-laundering and corruption.

We welcome the adoption by the Committee on Fisheries of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, at its twenty-fourth session in March 2001, of the International Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing. We believe this instrument, though non-binding, will serve to reduce illegal fishing practices pending the entry into force of the relevant instrument. In this regard, Nigeria and South Africa have entered into a joint naval agreement to strengthen the policing of South Atlantic waters in the African region. We urge Member States in the zone to continue to coordinate and exchange information in monitoring and identifying vessels involved in illegal fishing, especially the long-distance fishing fleets that enter the Atlantic frequently.

We are all aware that changes in the world economy have created tremendous opportunities as well as risks for the economies of most countries in the zone. While we recognize that liberalization and globalization hold great promises of prosperity for developing countries, thus far their impact has been very severe and their benefits have not been evenly shared. Thus, there is a dire need for South-South socio-economic institutions to integrate so as to pool their resources and cushion the effects of the financial crisis being faced by these countries.

In May last year, for instance, Nigeria hosted a meeting on the strengthening of trade ties within the zone, namely, between the Southern Cone Common Market and the Economic Community of West African States. The meeting provided a springboard for further progress in the development of joint activities related to education, health, scientific and academic research, state administration and reform, as well as cultural exchange. We are delighted at this development and support the recommendation that an annual meeting be held in New York at the level of permanent missions to exchange views on a regular basis, coordinate strategies and adopt a common regional position among Member States.

As a sponsor of this resolution, let me conclude by thanking the international community for its continued support and by commending the resolution for adoption by consensus.

The President *(spoke in Spanish)*: We shall now proceed to consider draft resolution A/56/L.12, as orally revised.

Before giving the floor to the speaker in explanation of vote before the vote, may I remind delegations that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Brown (United States): This draft resolution has a number of very positive elements, including references to the need for control of drug trafficking and illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons. However, the definition of the zone of peace could, in other contexts, be construed as an attempt to infringe on the freedom of navigation and the right of collective self-defence that are guaranteed under international law.

The United States is particularly concerned with operative paragraph 8 of the draft text. Paragraph 8 implies that the international scheme regulating the maritime transport of radioactive waste is not now adequate. On the contrary, the International Maritime Organization and International Atomic Energy Agency have recently completed a thorough review of this question, made improvements where required and concluded that the current international regulation scheme is fully adequate.

Thus, the United States will call for a vote on the draft resolution and on paragraph 8. We will vote no on paragraph 8, and on the draft resolution itself we will abstain.

The Acting President *(spoke in Spanish)*: We have heard the only speaker in explanation of vote before the vote.

A separate vote has been requested on operative paragraph 8 of draft resolution A/56/L.12, as orally revised.

Is there any objection to that request?

There is none. I shall therefore first put to the vote operative paragraph 8 of draft resolution A/56/L.12, as orally revised.

I shall now put to the vote operative paragraph 8 of draft resolution A/56/L.12, as orally revised.

A recorded vote has been requested.

A recorded vote was taken.

In favour:

Algeria, Andorra, Angola, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Finland, France, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Grenada, Guatemala, Iceland, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mexico, Monaco, Mongolia, Myanmar, Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Oman, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, San Marino, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Uruguay, Venezuela, Yugoslavia, Zambia

Against:

United States of America

Abstaining:

Singapore

Operative paragraph 8 of draft resolution A/56/L.12, as orally revised, was retained by 86 votes to 1, with 1 abstention.

[Subsequently the delegation of Malta informed the Secretariat that it had intended to vote in favour.]

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/56/L.12, as orally revised, as a whole.

A recorded vote has been requested.

A recorded vote was taken.

In favour:

Algeria, Andorra, Angola, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Finland, France, Gambia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Grenada, Guatemala, Iceland, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mexico, Monaco, Mongolia, Morocco, Myanmar, Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Moldova, Romania, San Marino, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Uruguay, Venezuela, Yugoslavia, Zambia

Against:

None

Abstaining:

United States of America

Draft resolution A/56/L.12, as orally amended, was adopted by 93 votes to none, with 1 abstention (resolution 56/7).

[Subsequently, the delegations of Israel and Malta informed the secretariat that they had intended to vote in favour.]

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I call on the representative of France, who wishes to speak in explanation of position on the resolution just adopted.

Mr. Brunet (France)(*spoke in French*): As in previous years, my delegation voted in favour of draft resolution A/56/L.12. However, my delegation would like to recall certain reservations that it continues to have on the general concept of the zone of peace. These reservations are related to uncertainties regarding the geographical limits of the zone envisaged, the precise nature of the obligations incumbent on the States and the desire to have the rules of international law respected, particularly regarding the use of maritime routes and international airspace.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): No other speakers have requested to speak. May I take it

that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 36?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 177

United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage, 2002

Draft resolution (A/56/L.13)

The Acting President *(spoke in Spanish)*: I call on the representative of Egypt to introduce draft resolution A/56/L.13.

Mr. Aboul Gheit (Egypt)*(spoke in Arabic)*: Among the various economic, social, political and other issues considered by the United Nations, cultural topics are of particular interest because, in the midst of economic interests that may sometimes be contradictory to and divergent with political positions, we note the role of cultural dialogue among peoples as a point of common interest, convergence and cooperation that opens the path for one party to better understand the nature, conditions and characteristics of the other parties.

Therefore, we note the particular importance of the issue under discussion today, because if culture and cultural dialogue play a fundamental role in international relations, the role of cultural heritage, considered human civilization's most valuable asset, regardless of its names or sources, is also important. Cultural heritage is the accumulation of human experiences and experiments that we inherited from our fathers and ancestors, who travelled along the path of civilization recording what they could, according to their knowledge and capabilities, whether by engraving on rocks or by inscription on leather or metal or through verses of poetry or painting on walls. These are all luminous traits that demonstrate the long and difficult path humanity has travelled, with a long series of successes and failures.

Our most basic duty to our ancestors is not only to preserve and protect the heritage they left for us, but also to examine it and extract from it eternal human values and experiences so that it can be a legacy to our children along the path of human civilization.

Today, more than ever, we should refer to our cultural heritage, study it and safeguard it. We should try to identify our common roots in the heritage of other peoples and civilizations. We will undoubtedly find fresh proof of humanity's single source and the single destiny of all peoples of the planet.

This initiative, the proclamation of the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage, is inscribed in this context. This initiative is being launched today, and, as the Assembly can see, it brings together representatives of the five continents of the world and a wide range of cultures and civilizations.

This is proof of the noble nature of the messages and the objectives around which representatives of the various civilizations and cultures have come together for a single objective: to deploy real efforts to safeguard the common cultural heritage of mankind. The proclamation of the year 2002 as the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage goes hand-in-hand with the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage of 1972. This is a momentous opportunity to raise world awareness of the need for common action to protect and highlight this heritage, particularly since the number of countries that have ratified the Convention is 167.

The Convention emerged 30 years ago as the outcome of our awareness of the dangers and perils to human heritage in general, not only from the point of view of the traditional elements of time and erosion, but also because of changing socio-economic factors that contribute to the loss of this heritage. This has seriously damaged the treasures of the cultural heritage of many civilizations in various areas of the world. Mankind has lost irreplaceable and priceless cultural property in some regions of the world. The Convention has completed the noble task of fine-tuning a list of 600 sites important to the common cultural world heritage, the world heritage in 122 countries across the five continents.

The international community is cooperating in the protection and enhancement of these sites through action coordinated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). UNESCO's indefatigable efforts over the past few decades to protect and preserve our human patrimony have made its acronym a symbol of tremendous value for cultural heritage and for signifying the safeguarding of our precious historical, cultural and natural heritage. According to its rules of procedure, UNESCO is in charge of protecting, enhancing and preserving world

patrimony in general, regardless of the location or nature of the asset. We could provide a number of examples of the vital role UNESCO has played in launching many campaigns and projects around the world to save sites that have been threatened by destruction. One campaign especially dear to us in Egypt was the 1960s campaign to save the Nubian monuments in southern Egypt from the flooding of the Nile River.

UNESCO also participated in and concluded a number of treaties on the protection of heritage, such as the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property.

The far-reaching institutional experience gained by UNESCO has made it the natural forum for coordinating the activities surrounding the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage, in collaboration with all Member States, governments and the relevant United Nations organs, as well as civil society and non-governmental organizations.

In introducing the draft resolution contained in document A/56/L.13 to the General Assembly today, we call for its adoption by consensus, because it would send a clear message about the international community's real intention to pursue joint action aimed at protecting cultural heritage, regardless of its nature. This could be done through a new project in the year 2002, the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage.

In conclusion, I have the pleasure of announcing that the following countries have joined the list of sponsors of draft resolution A/56/L.13: Argentina, Austria, France, Greece, Guatemala, Indonesia, Jamaica, Monaco, New Zealand, Norway, the Republic of Korea, the Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, Tunisia and the United States.

Mr. Gosal (Canada): Canada is pleased to support the draft resolution proposing that the year 2002 be proclaimed the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage. We do so in the context of Canada's active participation in the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage of 1972. The thirtieth anniversary of this historic Convention provides an opportunity for all countries concerned with the preservation of the world's cultural heritage to celebrate what has been achieved and to reflect on future challenges and opportunities.

Many of humanity's treasures must be protected through global action based on the principles of international solidarity and cooperation articulated in the World Heritage Convention. However, this Convention is not concerned only with sites of universal value. Signatories to the Convention also recognize that the responsibility for ensuring the identification, protection, conservation, presentation and transmission to future generations of the cultural heritage belongs primarily to each State.

The thirtieth anniversary of the World Heritage Convention serves as a reminder of the need to promote adherence to the other international standard-setting instruments that protect cultural heritage: the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its two Protocols and the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property.

This past month, the thirty-first session of the General Conference of UNESCO adopted by consensus the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, which elevates cultural diversity to the rank of the "common heritage of humanity". The General Conference also adopted a Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage and a resolution inviting the Director General to submit to the thirty-second session of the General Conference a preliminary draft international convention for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage. It also launched a new initiative against the deliberate destruction of cultural heritage — an international response to the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas.

(*spoke in French*)

This renewed commitment to the preservation of cultural heritage is the fruit of years of labour. The 1995 report of the World Commission on Culture and Development, "Our Creative Diversity", played an essential role in orienting this work. Drafted under the chairmanship of Mr. Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, this document reminds the world community that the rich tangible and intangible cultural heritage our generation inherited is fragile and its resources, for which we are responsible, are essentially non-renewable. The report urges States to pay particular attention to this heritage, including languages, folklore, oral traditions,

indigenous knowledge and local traditions. It draws a parallel between linguistic and cultural diversity and biodiversity, arguing that all are necessary to sustain the reservoir of knowledge and intercultural communication, and that there are "endangered species" in both the cultural and natural worlds.

Despite the short lead time, we believe that 2002 holds promise for world heritage. The impact of this International Year could be further strengthened through cooperation among: agencies of the United Nations system such as UNESCO, the World Bank, the World Intellectual Property Organization and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); governmental organizations such as the Council of Europe, the International Organization of la Francophonie, the Commonwealth, the Organization of American States, the International Network on Cultural Policy and the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Committee on Culture and Information; intergovernmental organizations dealing with heritage, including the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property; and non-governmental organizations such as the International Council on Monuments and Sites.

Our readiness to engage in fresh thinking and develop new tools to protect our cultural heritage was underlined by various measures taken by many countries in the recent past. The United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage provides opportunities for new approaches through collaboration with the education sector, natural and social sciences, tourism and cultural industries. It can also be a means for strengthening dialogue among peoples, supporting a culture of peace and contributing to sustainable human development.

The United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage would provide Member States with the opportunity to ensure that effective new measures are taken. These could include the adoption of appropriate and up-to-date policies and regulations, the establishment and proper funding of services and institutions, the development of scientific and technical studies and research and staff training.

Mrs. Borzi Cornacchia (Italy): By natural vocation and as a matter of public policy, Italy has long supported national and international efforts to protect and enhance cultural heritage. Thus, we wholeheartedly support the proclamation of the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage, 2002, and congratulate the promoters of this initiative.

In a welcome coincidence, this initiative falls on the thirtieth anniversary of the World Heritage Convention, which will also be celebrated next year by a special United Nations Educational, Scientific and Organization (UNESCO) Conference being hosted by Italy. We ascribe special meaning to the Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage because it provides an ideal frame of reference for all international legal instruments to protect our cultural heritage, and because of the broad consensus it enjoys in the international community, having been ratified by 167 States — almost as many as the membership of UNESCO and the United Nations itself.

As of a few weeks ago, we can now mention a new legal instrument among those listed in the preamble of today's draft resolution. I refer to the Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage, which was just adopted by the thirty-first General Conference of UNESCO. This new instrument aims to safeguard underwater archaeological treasures, which tell us so much about connections between civilizations and peoples, from the risk of irretrievable loss, market speculation and natural damage. In the near future, we also hope to see an international convention for the protection of the intangible cultural heritage. Following the international conference of experts, held in Italy in March of this year, UNESCO is now working to initiate the process of drafting the text.

My Government is convinced that if we wish to achieve dialogue between cultures and preserve historical memory for future generations, it is not enough to protect the tangible heritage. Instead, we also have to safeguard the fragile socio-cultural heritage that ranges from oral tradition and folklore to the issues envoked by the term "intellectual property." They, too, represent cultural properties, expressive traditions and living knowledge at the heart of a community's identity, visibility, capacity for dialogue and interaction.

Italy hosted the World Heritage Committee in Florence in 1983. This Committee — the Convention's governing body — is responsible for the various international campaigns to protect cultural property, and symbolizes the common cultural values attested to

in the UNESCO World Heritage List. 1983 is also an important year because it marked the start of a concrete international commitment to intervene when damage is done to our shared values, thereby overcoming a traditional reluctance.

In this light, following the bombing of Dubrovnik in 1991, Italy proposed and obtained a resolution signed by 48 States and adopted unanimously by the General Conference of UNESCO appealing to the conflicting parties to protect the cultural and natural heritage and urging them to withdraw from the city of Dubrovnik, which is included in the World Heritage List. In issuing this appeal, the General Conference set a new precedent by intervening more decisively to protect world cultural heritage at risk.

During the follow-up to that important resolution, Italy continued to play a proactive role. Some of the high points were the European Convention for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage of 1992, establishing a more effective system of joint responsibility and cooperation to prevent the illicit circulation of elements of the archaeological heritage within the European Union; the Unidroit Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects of 1995, adopted by a special diplomatic conference held in Rome, fostering international solidarity and strengthening the measures defined in the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property of 1970; and the adoption of the Additional Protocol to the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.

The success of such efforts is attested to, inter alia, by the presence on the World Heritage List of 690 sites — of which 529 are cultural, 138 natural, and 23 mixed properties — located in the countries of 122 States parties. These efforts were accompanied by a political reflection on intercultural relations and the representation of different cultures on the international scene, with the equal dignity and mutual enrichment and understanding that can be attained through intercultural contact.

Throughout this process, Italy has felt duty-bound to take initiatives aimed at reconciling geopolitical demands and the scientific need to manage the UNESCO sites. In fact, only two years into its term on the World Heritage Committee, my Government relinquished its spot to create an opening for new unrepresented States.

Italy has pledged to enter into a special collaboration with the World Heritage Centre, the operational structure of the World Heritage Committee. It has committed itself to making available both the necessary expertise and almost $1 million in supplementary resources for 2000-2001 towards favouring the candidatures of low-income countries, helping them to manage their sites, and strengthening the Centre's operational system.

Italy has also offered to organize an international conference to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention, believing that this would provide an important opportunity to review and reinvigorate international cooperation between countries equipped with technical and financial resources on the one hand and under-represented and economically disadvantaged countries on the other.

On the occasion of the conference, the Italian Government intends to renew its consistent ongoing commitment to cultural heritage, which is the common heritage of all humankind and an instrument of development, dialogue and cooperation among peoples. Italy therefore confirms its heartfelt support for the proclamation of 2002 as the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage, for the invaluable role that UNESCO plays, and for United Nations action to strengthen the protection and promotion of our shared cultural heritage.

Mr. Motomura (Japan): Japan has high regard for the preservation of cultural and natural heritage. We therefore deem it most timely that 2002, when we shall celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, is to be designated as the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage. Some 170 States parties, including Japan, have already ratified the Convention, and there are about 700 cultural and natural heritage sites all over the world that have been registered as world heritage. Each of those sites is part of the common heritage of all humankind, regardless of its geographic location. However, most are deteriorating and are in danger of being lost. It is therefore important for the international community to work together to make sure that future generations will inherit the treasures of the past.

While recognizing that cultural heritage sites are our common property, I note that each represents something unique, expressive of tradition, philosophy, religion and history. Particularly in this globalizing world, people are taking more interest in understanding and preserving their own cultural heritage as they endeavour to forge a cultural identity. In that regard, promoting education and raising awareness to foster respect for national and world cultural heritage are necessary if we are to further understand and respect other cultures and values.

The Government of Japan highly appreciates the activities undertaken by the United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (UNESCO) for the protection and preservation of the world's cultural and natural heritage, and we expect that UNESCO will continue to play a pivotal role as the lead agency in that area. For its part, through the UNESCO/Japan Trust Fund for the Preservation of World Cultural Heritage, established within UNESCO, as well as through bilateral cultural grant aid, Japan has been actively supporting the international community in its efforts to preserve and safeguard heritage. Both academic and non-governmental institutions are also vigorously engaged in promoting the protection of our common cultural heritage by organizing training courses, seminars and symposiums. It is imperative to transfer technology and expertise to local experts so that they can preserve their own cultural and natural heritage with a view to ensuring sustainable and self-perpetuating preservation. I would like to call on all Member States to join us in sparing no efforts to that end.

I now wish to touch upon our other treasures, namely our natural heritage, which comprises the physical forms taken by the world's diversity and which tells the history of how our planet has evolved. Recognizing that nature and mankind cannot be separated but are destined to coexist, the Government of Japan believes that the international community should make a collective effort to preserve it as well. Destroying nature poses a serious threat to human beings and to human security.

We should not forget the importance of protecting our intangible heritage. Intangible heritage serves as a common ground for the promotion of mutual understanding and enrichment among cultures and civilizations as well as an essential source of cultural identity for each nation. To protect and promote that heritage, Japan has supported UNESCO's activities for safeguarding traditional culture and folklore through the Japanese Trust Fund for the Preservation and Promotion of Intangible Cultural Heritage. We hope that the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage will also provide us with an opportunity to further raise awareness and to promote the importance of intangible cultural heritage.

At its 31st General Conference, held this year, UNESCO adopted the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity. The Declaration emphasizes that promoting mutual understanding and cooperation while respecting cultural diversity is essential for peace and for the development of humankind. Cultural diversity is respected when we recognize one other's cultures through the preservation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Japan therefore will continue to extend its cooperation to the preservation of our world cultural heritage. We believe that the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage will provide the international community with another opportunity to foster a spirit of peace, tolerance, mutual understanding and coexistence, as did the International Year for the Culture of Peace 2000, and the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations this year.

Mr. Sagach (Ukraine): At the outset, on behalf of the delegation of Ukraine, I would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to the delegation of Egypt for taking the lead in putting on the agenda of the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session an item on proclaiming 2002 as the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage, and for preparing the relevant draft resolution (A/56/L.13). I should like also to thank all the delegations that have sponsored and actively supported this timely initiative for their cooperative approach.

Cultural diversity is the most precious and delicate treasure granted to humanity. Not only national traditions but also masterpieces of art and architecture — masterpieces of human thought in the widest meaning of that word — have for hundreds of years served nations as an important source and background for maintaining their identity, strength and spirit in the quest for development and prosperity. Centuries have passed, but the heritage created by hundreds of generations has not lost its value. Moreover, as the decades pass, the cultural heritage created by our predecessors appears to play an ever-increasing role in our lives.

Persistent work to protect the historical and cultural values of human civilization is not only a vital necessity for all of us living in the contemporary world. It is also our moral responsibility and obligation, owed to both past and future generations.

On the threshold of the new millennium, humankind faces a threat that my country considers no less dangerous than any natural disaster. This threat has already been described as a crime against culture.

The recent destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan in Afghanistan is the most vivid example of such crime, in which religious intolerance, extremism and totalitarian philosophy have resulted in a cultural tragedy for the whole world. Those brutal acts of vandalism were strongly and unanimously condemned by the international community, including, first and foremost, the United Nations Security Council in March this year. I can add other cases of the destruction of World Heritage sites. The list may be prolonged.

These dramatic facts prove the necessity of reasserting the spirit of the World Heritage Convention, which calls upon the States parties to the Convention to protect the global heritage through cooperation, consensus and accord.

Nowadays, about 30 World Heritage properties are considered "World Heritage in Danger". We urgently need to do our utmost to prevent future tragedies by means of our united efforts and enhanced mechanisms for implementing the international instruments aimed at protecting the world cultural heritage. UNESCO and the World Heritage Committee should play the leading role in this endeavour. Ukraine fully supports the activities of UNESCO in strengthening the implementation of the World Heritage Convention. We encourage those States that have not yet done so to become a party to the Convention.

From our standpoint, it could also be appropriate to identify concrete ways for the timely and efficient involvement of the United Nations in cases where the urgent protection of world cultural heritage is required.

There are more than 140,000 historical and cultural sites under State protection in Ukraine. Among them, let me mention the more than 69,000 archaeological monuments, 55,000 historical sites and 15,000 structures of architectural heritage.

As you are well aware, the Kyiv Saint Sophia Cathedral and related monastic buildings, the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, as well as the ensemble of the historical centre of the city of Lviv, have been inscribed on the World Heritage List for cultural values. I would like to underline that an active policy of protecting our cultural heritage is one of the top priorities of the Ukrainian Government in the cultural field.

In 1997, the 29th session of the General Conference of UNESCO supported the initiative of Ukraine to proclaim an International Year of Protection of the World Cultural Heritage. The session of UNESCO Executive Board advised States to bring this issue to the attention of the United Nations General Assembly.

We are pleased to note today that, through our common efforts, notably those by Egypt, the highly important issue of the protection of cultural heritage has gained broad support on the part of Member States. In 2002, we shall mark the thirtieth anniversary of the World Heritage Convention. Obviously, it is most appropriate and timely to proclaim this year the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage.

Ukraine has the honour of cosponsoring of the draft resolution to be considered by the General Assembly under this agenda item today. We fully support the provisions of the resolution and call upon all Member States to endorse it.

Finally, let me express confidence that, through the united efforts of the United Nations, we shall succeed in reaching the noble goal of protecting and preserving the world cultural heritage for the benefit of the present and forthcoming generations, thus promoting mutual understanding and enrichment among the nations and further enhancing the dialogue between cultures and civilizations.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): We have heard the last speaker on the list.

The Secretariat has asked me to announce that, apart from the countries listed by the Permanent Representative of Egypt, the following countries have been added as sponsors of this resolution: Finland, Madagascar, the Republic of Moldova, Suriname and The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/56/L.13?

Draft resolution A/56/L.13 was adopted (resolution 56/8).

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 177?

It was so decided.

Programme of Work

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): Next Monday morning, 26 November, the third item taken up will be agenda item 45, entitled "Question of the Falkland Islands (Malvinas)". The fourth item at the meeting will be the report of the Fifth Committee on sub-items (a) to (d) and (f) of agenda item 17, entitled "Appointments to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other appointments".

I would also like to inform the Assembly that the reports of the First Committee will be taken up on Thursday morning, 29 November.

The meeting rose at 5.20 p.m.